

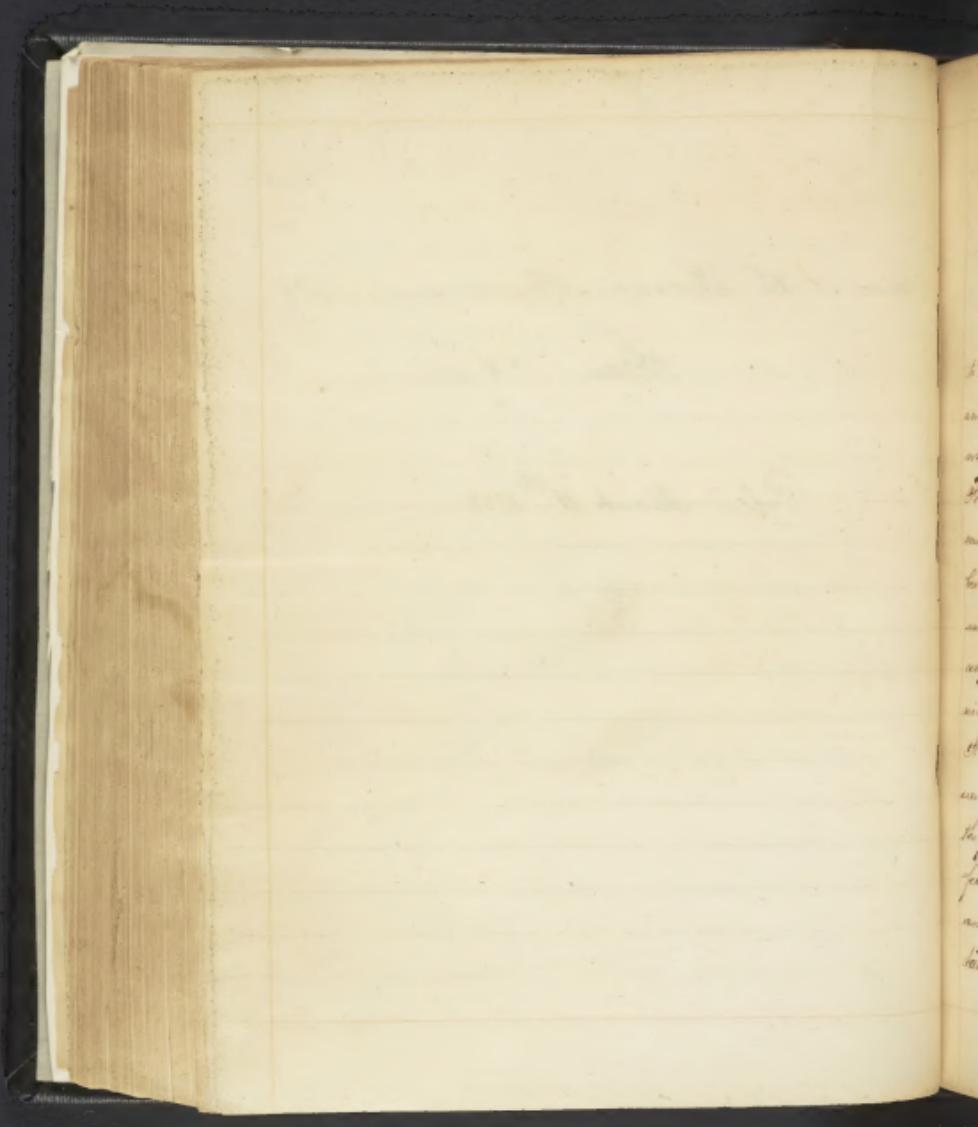
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Deer at the Phila. Almshouse in 1821

Samuel C. Williams

Published March 11th 1823



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Case at the Philadelphia M. & S. Hospital in 1831.

This was a bilious fever, of an aggravated character, which appears to have been confined to a particular class of inhabitants in this city, *via libertas*, viz; the most indigent and miserable of the negroes; from which circumstance it derived the popular name of the "black fever".

For several summers past it has prevailed among them with great mortality; during the last disease I recollect having seen a great number of cases of this description, while attending the practice of the Hospital, and very many fell victims to it. I shall attempt to give a sketch of the complaint as it presented itself to my own immediate view this season, with the comparative effect of the different remedies employed for the cure. It was about the latter end of Aug that the first patients labouring under this disease were admitted into the Philadelphia M. & S. Hospital; the few first cases having the well marked character of ordinary bilious fever, excited no suspicion, and were in fact easily treated by the common depleting means. As the weather became warmer, the number of patients considerably increased, accompanied with a corresponding degree

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of malignancy, until the beginning of July, when it suffers a check, seemingly in consequence of the weather becoming suddenly very cool. During this period however, a great many patients were received into this institution. The disease as has already been stated, prevails principally among the lowest class of the blacks; and its prevalence among them has been attributed (and we doubt with much propriety) to indolent and intemperate habits of life, to which they are naturally disposed; to which may be added a scanty and unwholesome diet, and a total disregard to cleanliness, both personal and in their habitations.

Another vice to which they are addicted, is drunkenness; they take but little substantial food, drink to excess, and during a state of intoxication will ungraciously expose themselves to the scorching rays of the sun by day, and at night to the noxious vapours at this time prevailing, by lying below the doors of their miserable habitations.

They are often crowded together in the narrow and dirty alleys of the Liberties, particularly in confined places, when not ungraciously two or three families of these unhappy beings exist in a space so small as would scarcely make as many individuals comfortable. There are many other vices and irregularities an fruitful sources of so much sickness and death, when they prevail in so high a degree. The disease once

excited, suddenly prostrates the powers of life to such a degree, as to deprive all our efforts to subdue it entirely timely attended to; this melancholy fact was but too frequently exemplified during its prevalence.

Another cause of its mortality was want of medical attention in proper time, and other accommodations to render their situation comfortable. As consequence of extreme poverty they seldom solicited medical aid, and often this situation was not made known to the Guardians of the Poor, until they were beyond all hope of recovery. Such being the fact, they were not unfrequently brought here in so low a state, that many die a few hours after admission; and resort, to the no small degree of despatch of the physicians, were found dead in the carts on their arrival here.

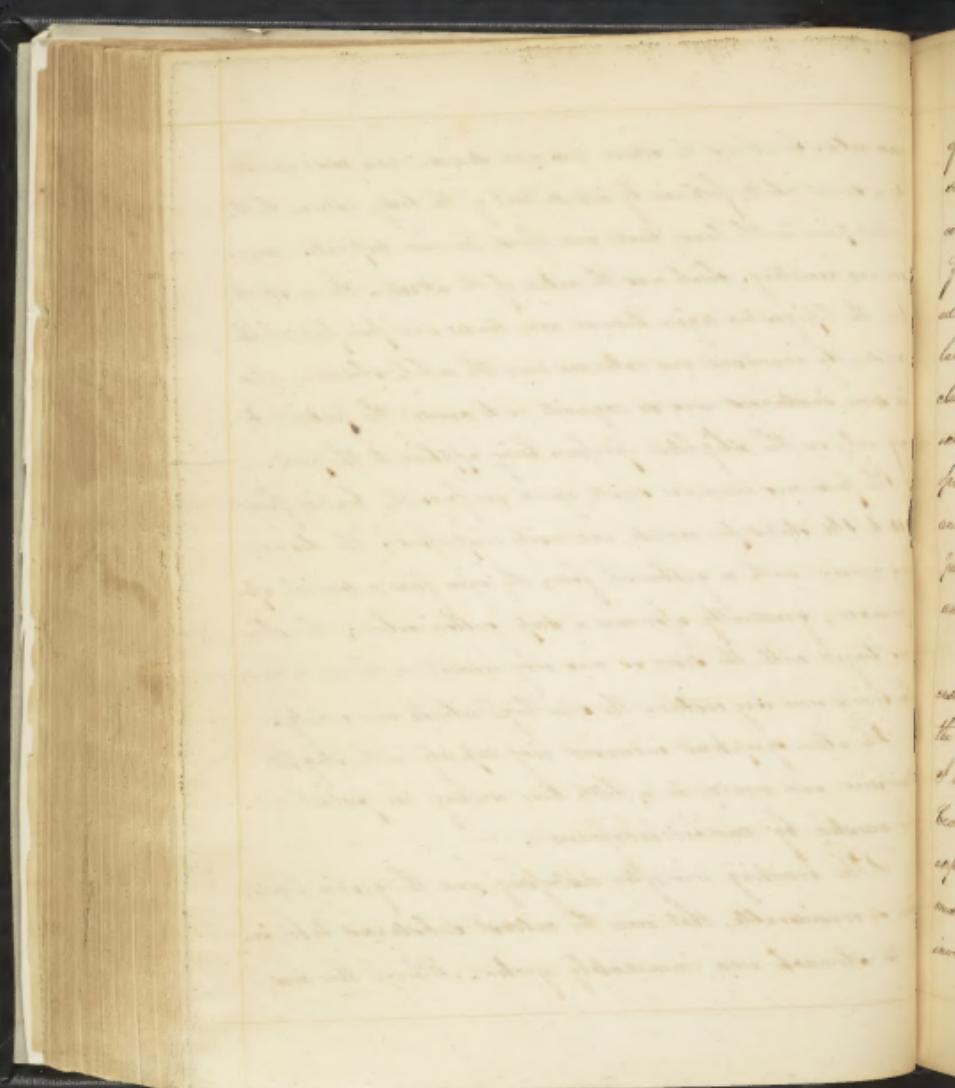
I shall now endeavor to describe the symptoms and progress of the disease, as well as circumstances will admit. It was almost impossible to gain any satisfactory information from the patients themselves, in consequence of the disturbed state of their minds. From such however, as could ascertain ^{their} feelings about the time of the attack, it appeared, that a few days, sometimes but a few hours preceding that event, the patient felt a general languor or weariness and drowsiness, with alternate sensations of heat

and colder. Sometimes the attack was more sudden, and less unannounced by a smart chill, followed by intense heat of the body, extreme thirst, violent pain in the head, teeth and loins, hurried respiration, nausea and vomiting. Such was the nature of the attack. In a short time the Epigastric region became very tender and painful, which gradually increased and extended over the whole abdomen, and in some instances was so exquisite as to cause the patient to cry out, on the slightest pressure being applied to the part.

The pulse was commonly small, quick and frequent, beating from 110 to 140 strokes per minute, and easily compressible; the tongue was covered with a yellowish fur; the eyes from a reddish appearance, gradually assumed a deep yellow colour; the skin was tinged with the same, as was very evident in the malattoes; the bowels were very constipated, the urine high colour and scanty.

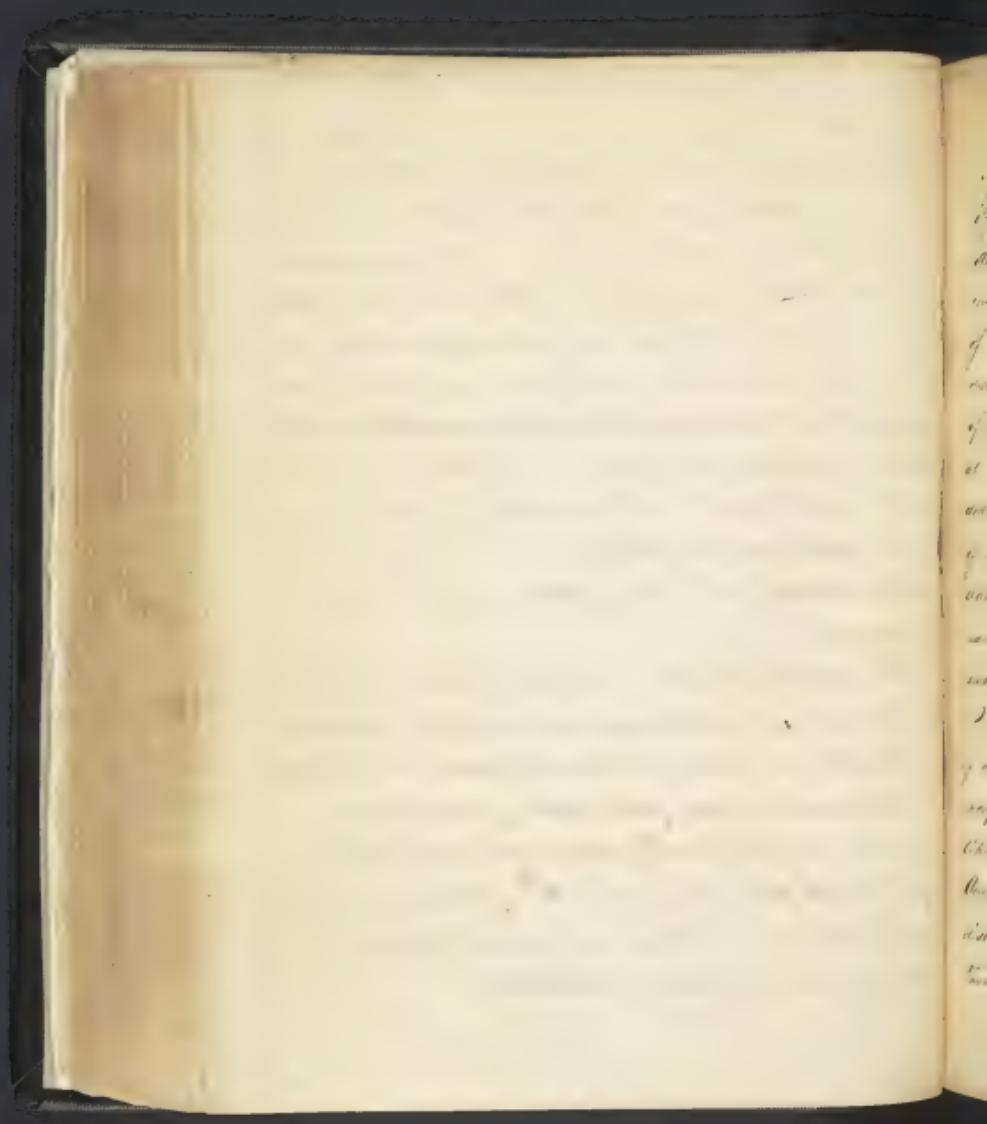
The above symptoms increased very rapidly, with slight convulsions, and would in a little time destroy the patient unless arrested by medicinal intercourses.

The vomiting was often distressing, and the gastric irritation so considerable, that even the mildest substances taken into the stomach were immediately ejected. Although there was



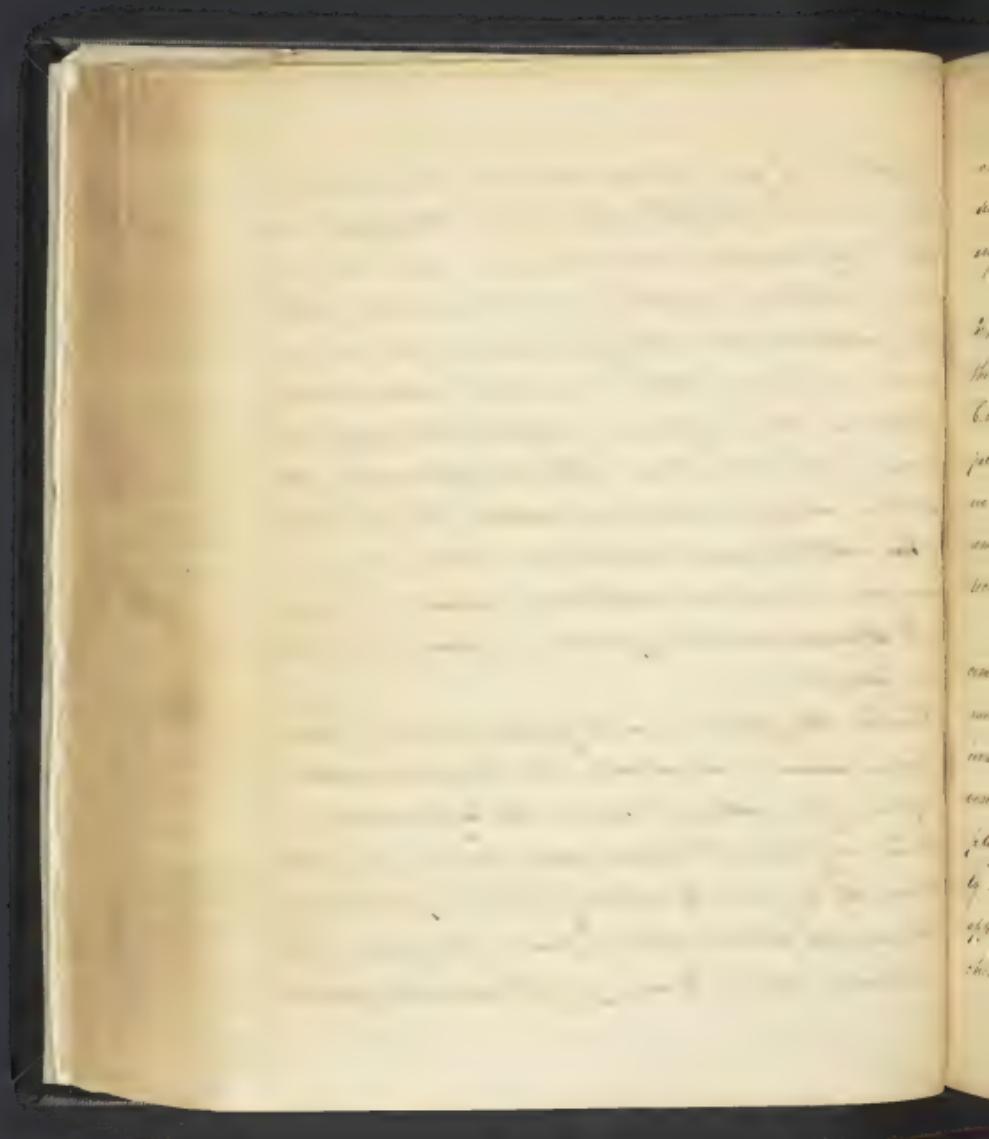
of the considerable development of the epithelial jævethis, there were often much delirium; more frequently the patients were in a somnolent state, and when roused up would often describe their feelings with seeming justification. If the disease was not checked in its course, the fatal symptoms quickly appeared, such as laborious respiration, having no effusion at the chest, cold chalybeate sweat, and ultimately total insensibility to all external impressions, accompanied with a cold and tremulous pulse. The skin it was observed was brown, dry and wrinkled, and also at short intervals the mouth and fingers were injected and any act a loss of control of either the limbs and glands.

The muscular strength in the advanced stage, was in some cases astonishing; the patient would rise out of his arm chair, the door step, and climb a few steps before death. In the intervals of intermission with intermission patients almost gradually got out of bed, walk around the floor they uttered again to their beds and again in the act to lie down. This redundant degree of muscular strength was always an unfavorable symptom, and invariably foretold a protracted dissolution.



leuka by my friend Doctor Cawson & examined the major
part of those that die. He uniformly found the Stomach in a
state of inflammation, varying however in degree. In a few
cases it contained a quantity of dark stained fluid, thick
of a peculiar and somewhat offensive smell; this was con-
sidered as Fresh & blood mixed with the natural secretion
of this organ, by an experienced pathologist who was present
at one of the examinations. Other the inflammation extended
to the duodenum; and in one instance the whole tract
of the intestine was in such a state of inflammation, being of a
dark color and covered with distinct blisters etc, having
in the Stomach a similar appearance of black blood or those
cases etc etc.

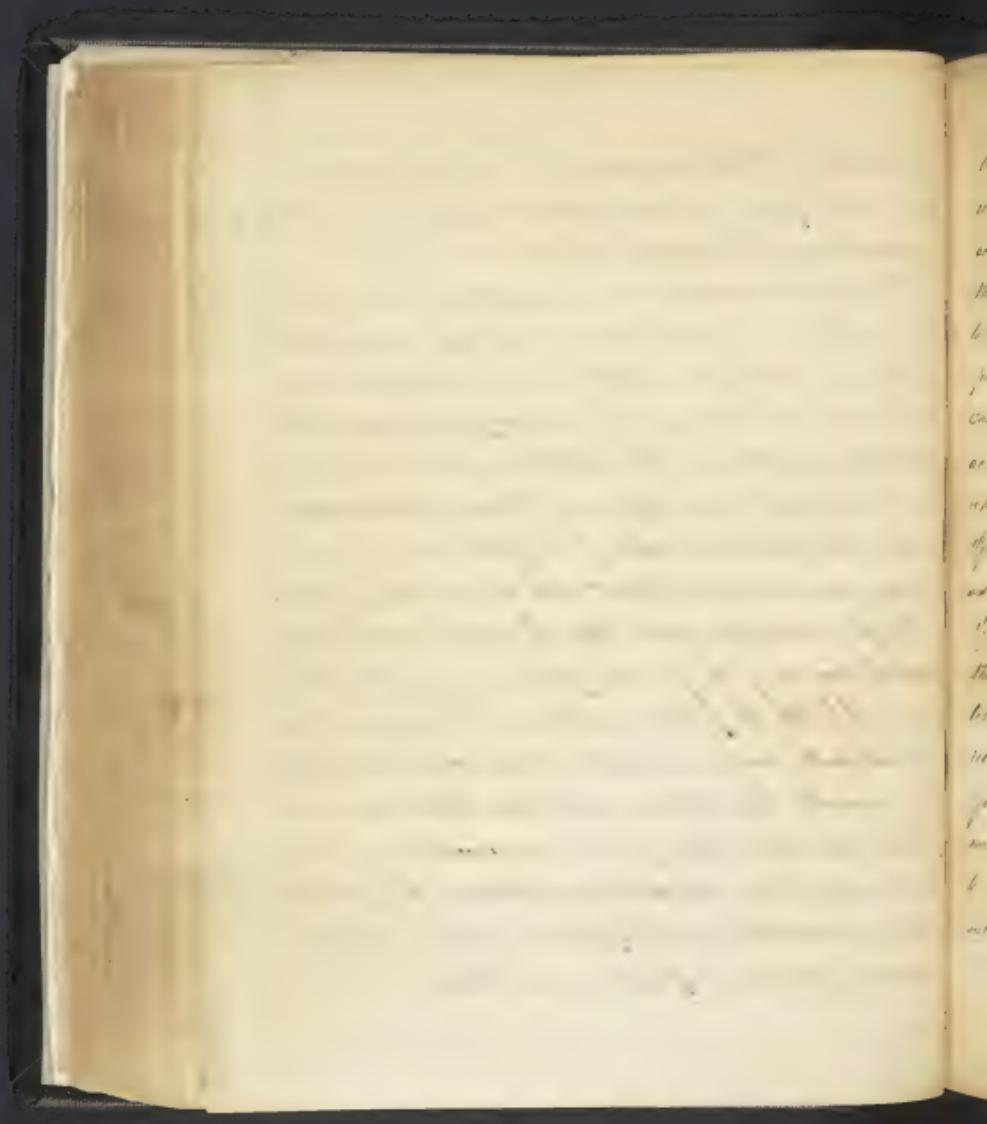
The Liver though common in its function to act as a
filter organic poison in the blood, that the vessels of the
spleen in a few instances it becomes rather stiff; its vessels were
obstructed, the thinnest vessels were in a dense state.
Occasionally we found the vessels of the brain partially
obstructed with blood; and the ventricles containing more fluid
than is natural, when it occurs, its color natural in appearance



ana structure. The disease appears to have been the primary
seat of this complaint, and it is most of the patients and disease &
very donations of the patients themselves were given.

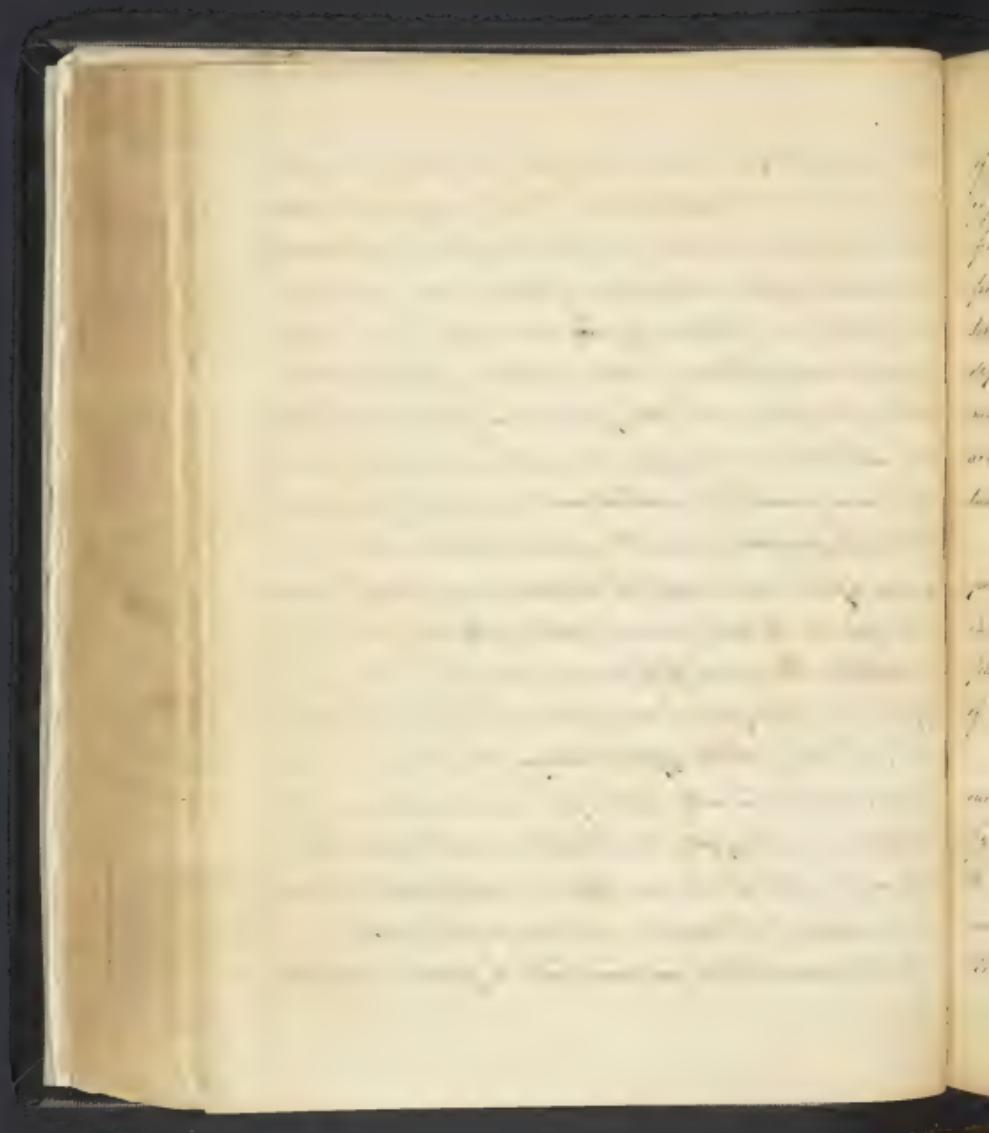
1. What were remedies employed for the cure.
From what had already been said, it must appear evident, that
the stage in which general debility would have been most
dangerous had in the majority of cases delayed previous to the
patient being admitted into this Institution; this being the fact,
we were in a great measure ignorant of the use of this active
remedy; but whenever the state of the patient made a cure,
success was had to the lancet with the most happy effect.

The first indication, was to allay the gastric irritation, which
commonly was one of the first symptoms, and frequently continuous
from 10 to 12 till the patient come here; for this purpose the con-
vers antiperistaltic remedies such as the Neutral mixture, the alter-
rotting draught, lime water and milk, Soda Water &c were em-
ployed; sometimes either of these would succeed, more common-
ly all would fail; under such circumstances a large blister
applied immediately over the Epigastric vein invariably
checked it, provided it proceeded evanescent.



When considerable pain existed in the part, local blistering was incision previous to its application. Having completed the stool, the alimentary canal was claimed attention; to remove this content, eight or ten grains of calomel were first given to the patient and followed up by small doses of some other purgative, as an infusion of Senna, solution of Senna, solution Castor oil 8s as one or the other forced by a syringe to the stomach; until three or four copious evacuations should be produced which were generally of a black colour and very tenacious. If the last purgations were all rejected, calomel in smaller doses was repeated alone until the bowels were sufficiently moved. The juice in the stool was not retained after the operation of the cathartics, blood was freely drawn from the fingers and temples with the cups and door needles which frequently gave relief; if not, a blistre application between the shoulder blades failed. As a spot in allaying the pain and removing the inflammation were also applied to the abdomen, with small hand towels the 10th June; the bowels were kept in a soluble state through out the course of the disease with some suitable medicine.

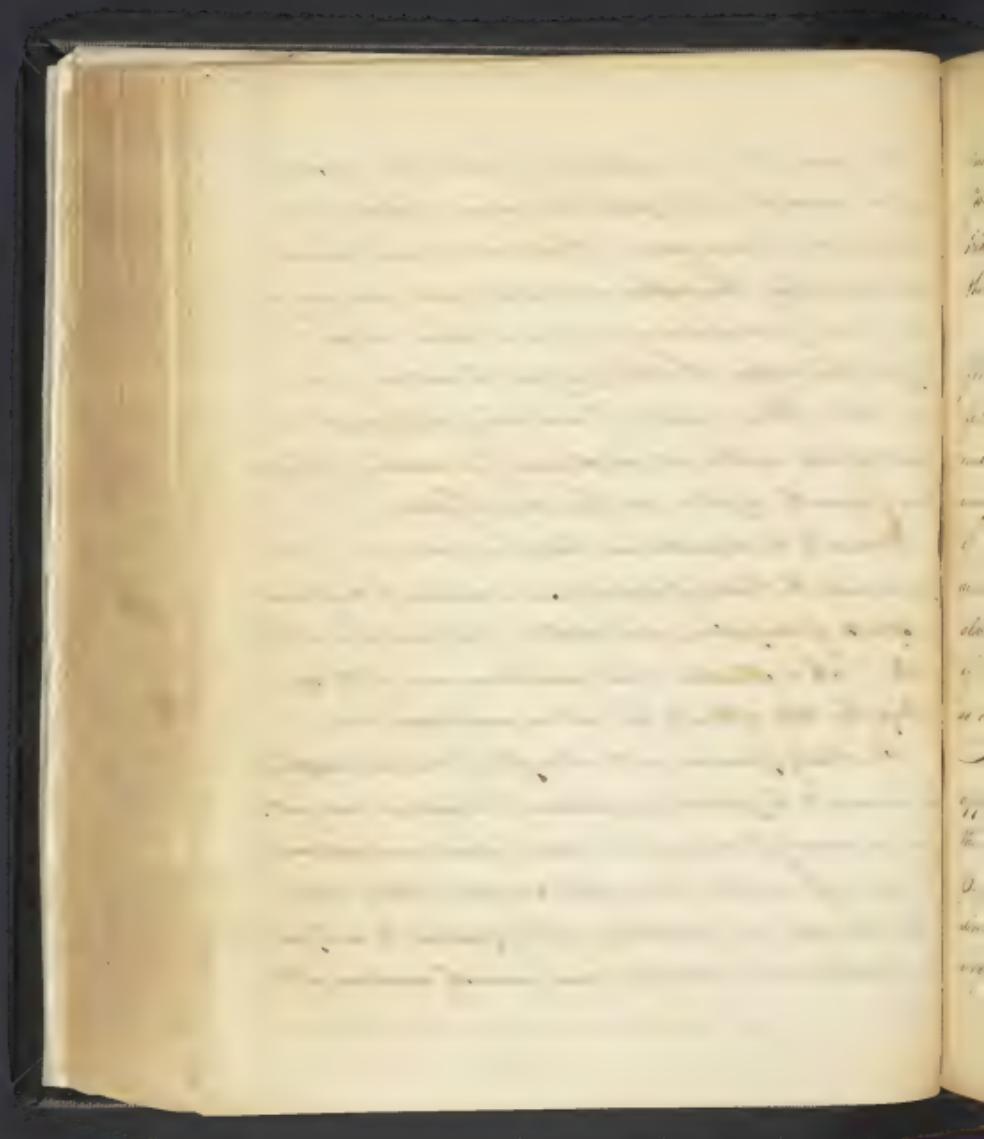
On the 20th June 11/2 hours past noon I found a mitigation



of the disease. Hence our efforts to the natural, and most
easy, have recourse to a variety of methods but a disease is a disease, the
poor process it can generate. Therefore all our means however
simple unassisting the system, could do but repel and counter-
act the evil, propagation would go on, when it became evident to
despise the system. For this purpose the carbuncle of course
now, with a blunt cautery I now apply with force, an
ardent spirit, together with small doses of a decoction of diges-
tive leaves the saponaria, were found most effective.

Therefore to the carbuncles were thrown in, as far as the
power of the hands of surgeon will allow a mixture of Saponaria
in Spirit. & Linseed oil, which creates a heat and glow in the
parts. As a stimulant, this was like in mode of the effects
of a resolute like extract, but with a recent advantage.

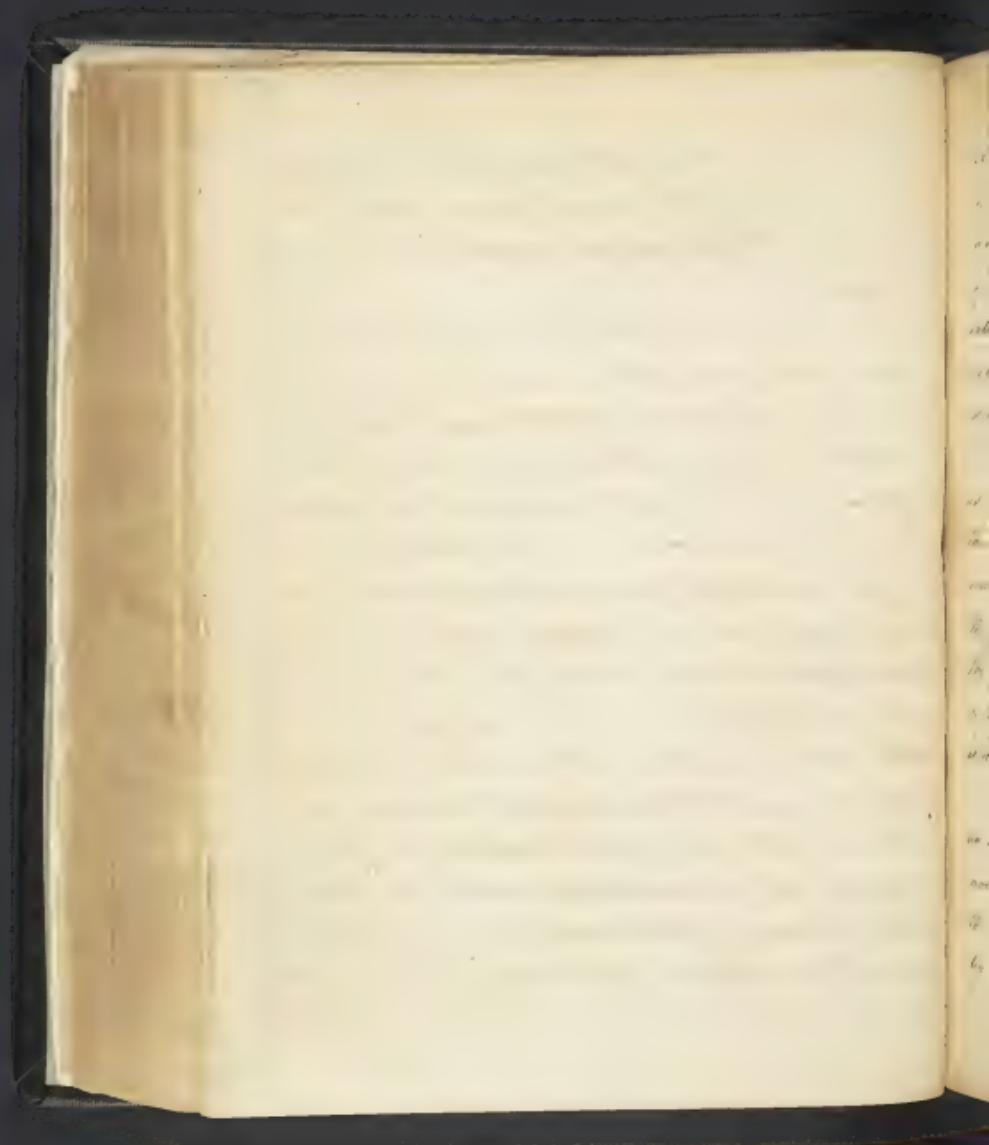
The only proceeding is to lay hold of natural, adapting
our remedies to the particular violence of the case, & now great
care is necessary to use a patient manner under circumstances
most unfavorable. During the convalescent state, which
is too slow and protracted, with application to subdue,
a Resolute like extract are often curiously combined, with



In addition of a emollient, together with a liberal quantity of
water which the patient is generally preferable to every other
kind of liquor. The cool also need adaptible to the condition of
the patient.

This was the method of treatment pursued, which has
been found most satisfactory: I now call it the emollient
method, more however, with reference to the disease. It is, to a
certain degree, a remedy, presented itself. As the patient
was, & can take, there is no reason to suppose, but what
the disease is curable. This, however, is not all, it is not all
as yet, as there is a slow & protracted course of improvement. This, however,
also had a rapid recovery. It will, I suppose, in the course
of recovery see the patient. I venture to give it a fair trial,
as our time & health in bad have been discouraging.

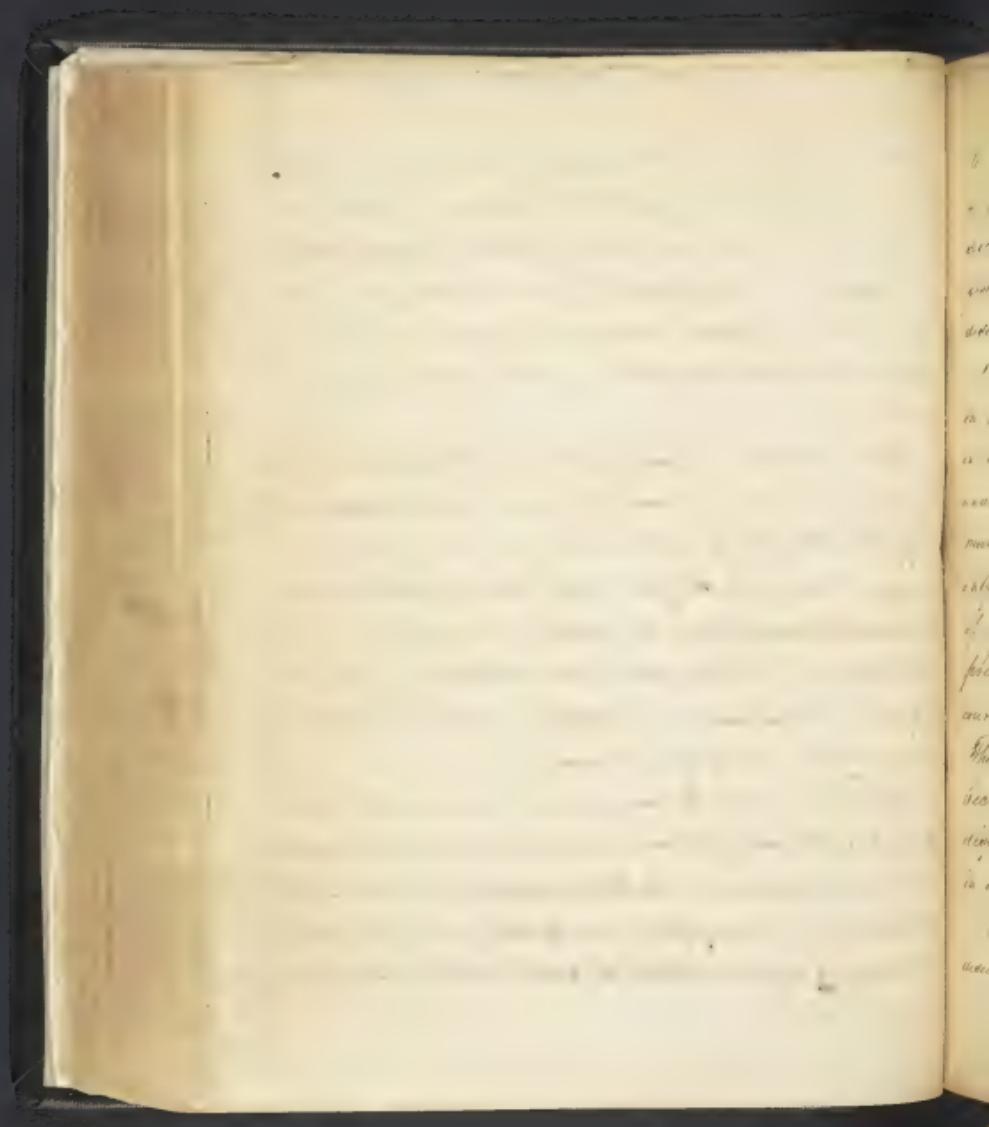
After the承氣 has been freely emollient, over the ordinary
of application must be the time, sometimes, & sometimes, giving
the salve, until the time of patient's delirium as often as
I desire. For this purpose two or three grains of opium are
desir'd, every second fourth or sixth hour according to the
course of the delirium. If the maniacal action would be



violent, it always runs the disease. Now, as to when
a violent disease can & must be thought of, it is, when
the disease runs violent, & when the susceptibility
of the patient to the disease, or, in other words, the
patient's disposition in some way, or tendency to some
certain disease, is so strong, that it is of
considerable duration in us, & a violent relapse runs of
itself.

Now, a relapse we may call the run of this disease, & as
as no one limited experience has ever told us, as occurs in
the course of another's disease, or not, we are in doubt, so
indeed, it may be, as to the cause of this relapse, but it is
the natural course which the patient, & incurable disease
he meets with, the unpleasing, and alluvial patient can
do equal. We also observe the patient seems to undergo
a violent course, & of 6 weeks.

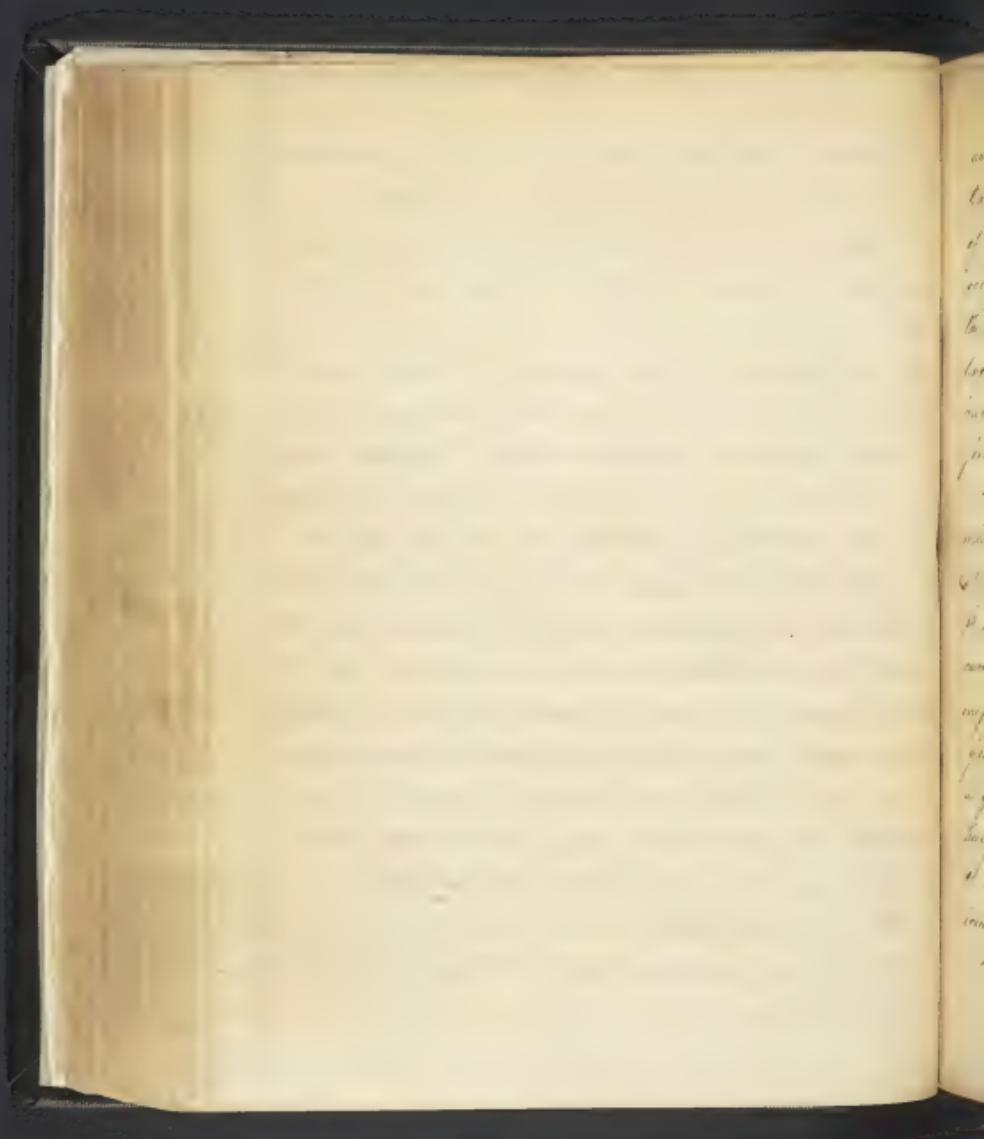
I have, however, to say, as a word, as this disease
as it, generally starts to our notice, but under all circumstances
would not consider it a violent disease for the cure. As
to violence, it is the complaint, we treated in its first stage
by bleeding, we see, abated by such medicines as determine



To the skin, I now fully伏信 they could be attended with a favourable result; this is confirmed by the testimony of several practitioners, who informed me, that the antiphlogistic plan succeeded with them in the first stage of the disease.

In the treatment of fevers generally, the plan ranks low in the best of our times, and should always be kept in our repertory; had I known it one of the most certain and efficacious means to be used, and when judiciously managed, equally safe; but it is in the commencement only, that it can be applied to a sufficient extent to be of essential and permanent benefit in a disease like the former, whose attack was sudden and severe, whose course was very rapid, and in a short time prove fatal. This important period having elapsed, our means of cure became more limited and uncertain; it was here moreover difficult to its powers and uses to set the only medicine in which any degree of confidence could be placed.

In the forenoon of the 1st an account of the fatal disease, I have often made application to the narrator of facts



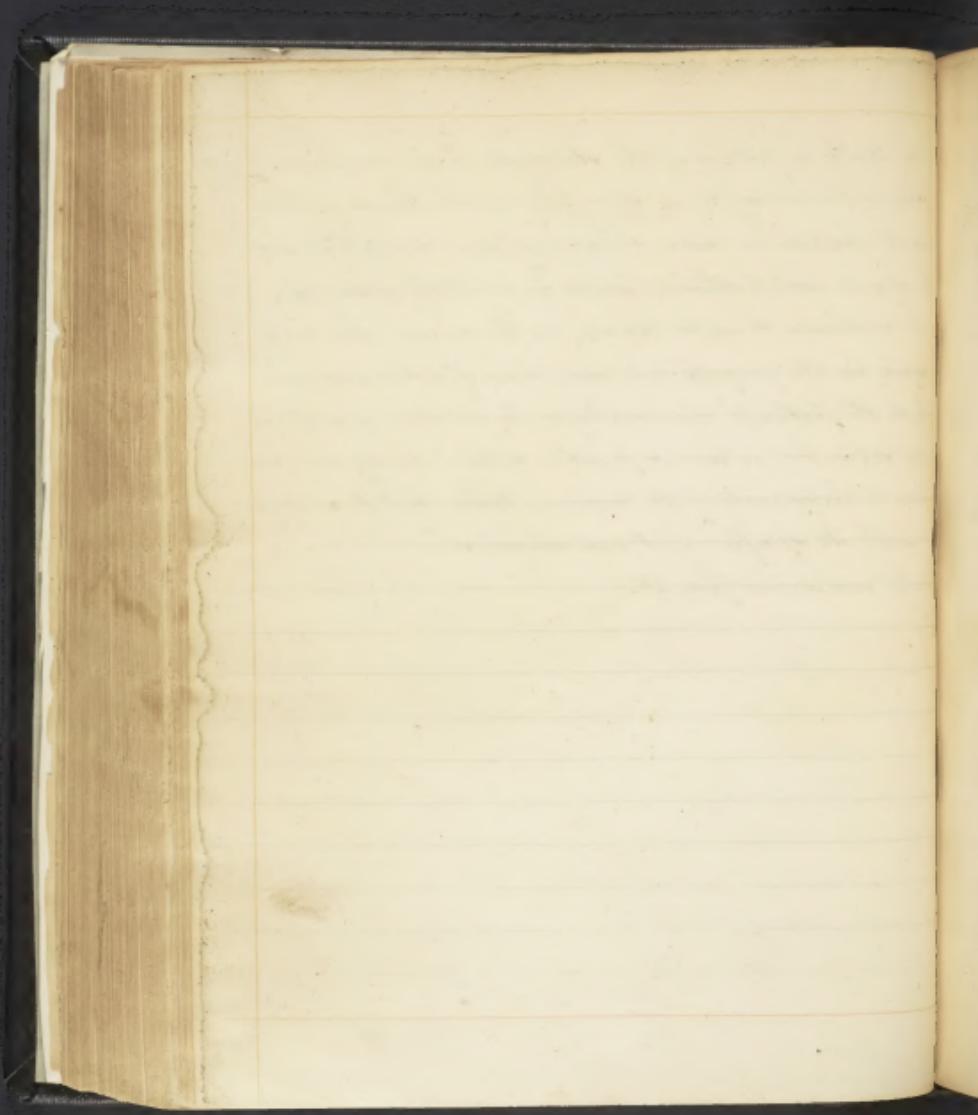
as this occurred at the first visit. I might easily have con-
sidered this paper to a much greater length by the insertion
of cases, and the detail of symptoms occasionally obser-
ved; but since I trust has been said to point out
the nature of the complaint. One of the chief objects in writing
the above has been to testify to the superior effi-
cacy of Muriate in rheumatism. Last year, after the
first day was spoken.

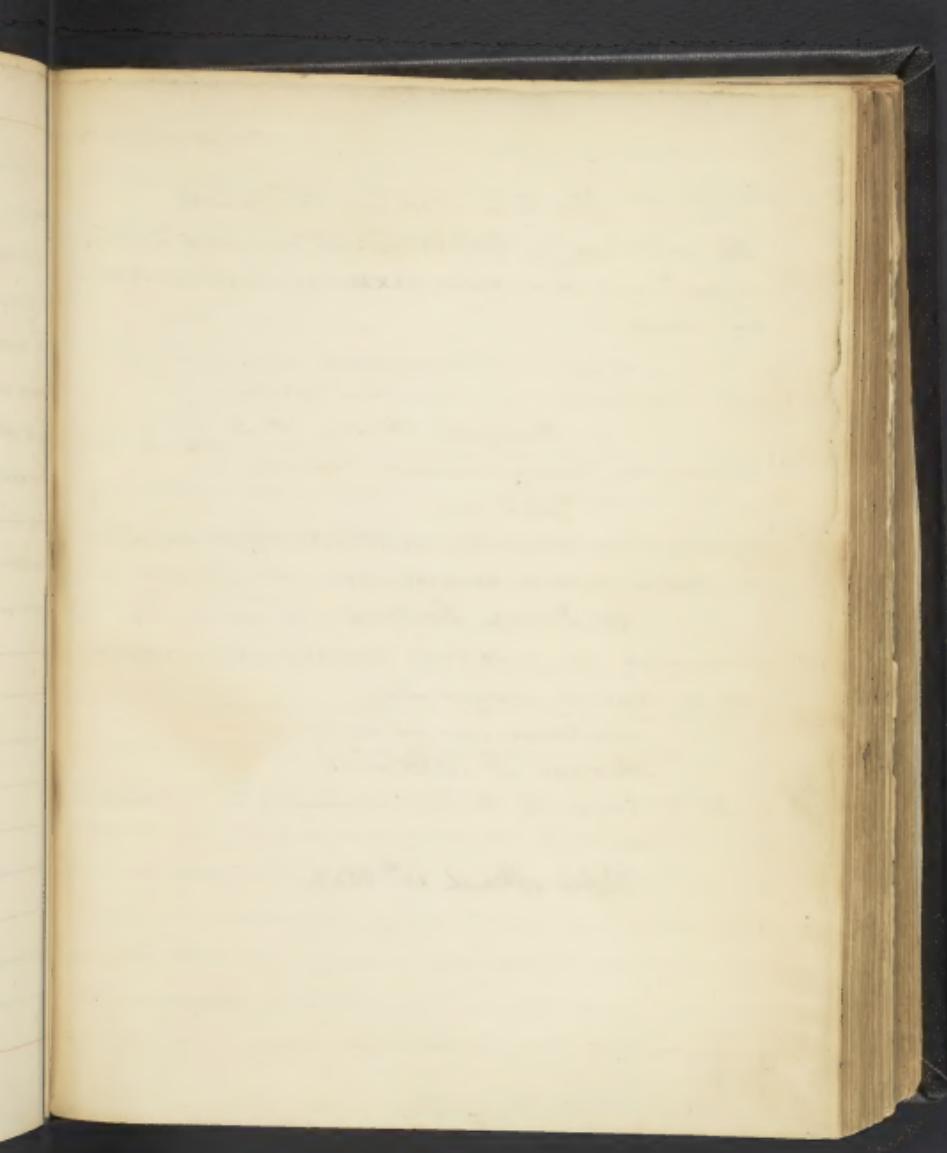
The practice is not novel. I was informed by a gentleman in
who has charge of this arm, named Mr. Gardner, surgeon
& which time he was not very successful and 'falter'd' and
it was noticed to the fact that salivation was the only rem-
edy to the patient, while every other means, tried, were
inoperative. Yet in the complement of this remedy a
great mistake was committed; it was given in too small
a quantity; the patient made & lie die before the man
had time to exert its powers unfein; & the circumstances
it was seen apparent, which induce me to proscribe the med-
icine &c &c as already stated.

I will not remain as above physician to determine on

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The truth or fallacy of the statements herein mentioned.
Should the remedy be as successful in the hands of others
as it has been in mine, I am confident many lives will
be saved, which otherwise would be infallibly destroy'd.
In conclusion I must observe, as the disease was very
rapid in its progress, and every hour of delay was great-
ly to the patient's disadvantage, the intention was to ex-
cite delirium as soon as possible, without having any re-
gards to the quantity of the medicine taken, but to continue
it, until its specific effect was coinc'd, short of which, no
benefit was derived from it.





Testamen Medicum Inaugurale
de morbis, qui per Frankliniensem comitatem publice
præsati sunt, Anno MDCCCLXXXIIIndi Martii et Apri-
lis mensis —

quod

sub moderatione viri admodum eructuosi

Frederick Brasley S. L.

Universitatis Pennsylvaniensis Praefecti

sec. Ann.

Ex curatorum auctoritate nullum, et amplissima
facultatis medica decedit,

Pro Gradu Doctoris

summiq[ue] in Medicina honoribus et privilegiis
ita et legitime consequendis;

auditorum examini subicit

Andreas F. McDowell

De Philadelphie Pennsylvaniensis; — — —

Patent March 12th 1823